

PRIMARY SOURCES, CRITICAL THINKING AND HISTORICAL THINKING IN A NINTH  
GRADE SOCIAL STUDIES CLASS

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by  
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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background

In history classes for years now many students have been complaining about how boring history is. You will hear questions asking things such as, “Why do we need to know this, it happened one hundred years ago.” A typical problem social studies teachers have is figuring out how to get students interested and involved in the material they are covering. Doppen (2000) study reported that, “... students found social studies uninteresting because they failed to see the relevance of the subject to their own lives and because they found it boring, too detailed and redundant” (p.159). Typical direct instruction in the social studies classrooms uses lectures, multiple choice tests, worksheets and textbooks as the main mode of instruction and evaluation. Students do not enjoy this repetitive type of learning where instead of constructing meaning from the text, they just have to memorize information to pass the test making the information easily forgotten in the next few days. Through the use of primary sources students can gain an appreciation of the past and begin to feel involved in what is being taught in the social studies classroom. Primary sources are not an answer by themselves to solving the problems that teachers face in motivating students but rather an alternative method that can get students who don’t learn through the “banking” method of teaching to discover for themselves the excitement of history classes.

Multiple studies have shown that students enjoy using primary sources. When sources are carefully selected and used to shed light on broader issues than a

single topic, primary sources can be a very effective instructional method. According to Cleary and Neumann (2009), “too often, teachers provide students with documents in isolation and expect the documents to “speak for themselves” (p. 74). It takes the expertise of the teacher to carefully select sources and structure questions so that the student can fully understand the document and what it means in the overall context of the event. Cleary and Neumann go on to say from the same source, “... a good question provokes students to reflect on the complexity of historical circumstances” (p. 77). Good questions inspire students to take into account all the variables and use historical inquiry (sourcing, collaboration, contextualization), ask guiding questions, and use historical empathy to better understand the historical event. As cited by Bill Tally and Lauren Goldenberg (2005), Wilson and Wineburg (2001) found,

successful history teachers construct activities in which students encounter documents for multiple purposes, such as noting point of view and bias and thinking about why different accounts vary, whereas less successful teachers construct activities in which students encounter documents for a much more narrow and restricted set of purposes, such as illustrating an idea or event, or finding the author’s bias (p. 2).

Eamon (2006), in discussing how history classes have been taught in the past, says that “while educators have agreed that history could be taught better, the solutions to this dilemma have been varied and have followed a pattern of being suggested, modified, and forgotten, only to be rediscovered again” (p. 299). This cyclical discussion about using primary sources has

been a hot topic of debate at times since before the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Eamon (2006) and Osborne (2003), early advocates of using primary sources include Fling of Nebraska and Ryerson of Canada. They felt that the main idea of teaching history should not be the coverage of content but rather an understanding of how history is constructed. Fling thought that understanding the historical method “should be the primary goal of history teaching and that this was best done through teaching students to analyze and evaluate primary sources” (as quoted in Osborne, 2003, p. 466). In 1844, Ryerson, as cited in Eamon (2006), warned of the dangers of textbooks:

They are, little more than dry digests of general events, which do not interest the pupil, and which he cannot appreciate; and learning the answers to the questions is a mere work of memory, without any exercise of discrimination, judgment, taste or language, --- forgotten as soon as learned.

What both Fling and Ryerson are arguing for is an education with meaning that does not involve the rote learning of facts from lifeless textbook stories. Social studies shouldn't be about answers you can look up in bold print in a textbook. Having background knowledge is important but as educational psychologist Samuel Wineburg (1991a) puts it, “able high school students can know a lot of history but still have little idea of how historical knowledge is constructed” (p. 84). Students often do not understand how history in a textbook was created. One major problem according to Wineburg (1991a) is that students are, “ignorant of the basic heuristics used to create historical interpretations (p.84).” When students do not understand how history is created, they may be missing out on the appeal of the past by looking

for answers rather than searching for meanings and reasons behind why events have happened.

### Statement of the Problem

Students are not interested in history class unless they have a natural affinity for social studies these days. This study sought to understand using primary sources in social studies classrooms to promote historical inquiry and critical thinking. It is my hope by using primary sources and teaching about the basic heuristics needed to understand history that students who wouldn't normally find history interesting will begin to take an interest as they learn how to actively participate with the information they are learning by reducing history to its simplest form. It is like Carl Becker (1931) explained in *Everyman His Own Historian*; we are all "subject to the limitations of time and place" that surround us and are called upon to be our own historians. Mr. Everyman has to sort through his yesterdays to see what is relevant today and "in a very real sense it is impossible to divorce history from life" (p. 227).

### Research Questions

Based on the scholarly literature, the research questions that guided this Master's Research Project were:

1. How can primary sources be used effectively to promote historical inquiry?
2. How can using primary sources foster critical thinking?
3. How does a novice's knowledge about the structure of history differ from that of historians?
4. How do social studies teachers currently use primary sources in their secondary education classrooms?

## Purpose/Significance

The purpose of this study was to discover how primary sources can be used in the classroom to promote historical inquiry and foster critical thinking. It seeks to add to the growing body of research about using primary sources in the high school classroom. Using a questionnaire, I asked students questions about how they use and think about primary sources and what they think about history class in general. This is important because in understanding how high school students perceive the use of primary sources and the textbook we can make generalizations about how best to teach history in the future. Also the answers received from my sample will add to the research about students' current dispositions towards using primary sources and social studies in general.

## Delimitations

The focus of this Master's Research Project was on using primary sources to foster historical inquiry and critical thinking. Information about sourcing, corroboration and contextualization was garnered to gain a better understanding of the effects primary sources have on students. The available scholarly research consistently suggested the key to making history class exciting again was not a "better" textbook but better teaching methods to get students involved in a more inquiry based approach to learning history. None of the research I found reported any contrary findings.

## Limitations

An unavoidable limitation to this study was my lack of experience in the high school classroom. I have only had the opportunity to run daily operations in a classroom for a quarter of college with one set of high school students. This is nothing in comparison to experienced teachers who have dedicated their lives to teaching and had thousands of students to observe. I am learning and developing as a teacher and researcher but this Masters Research Project seeks to answer questions I developed while teaching and will add more research to the current discussion about the advantages of using primary sources.

The research gathered over the course of this study was from the high school where my student teaching took place. My sample is fairly small (51 students) and ethnically limited with 94% of my students being of Caucasian decent. Another study would need to be done with more ethnically diverse students to see if the same results could be replicated. Another limitation is that the questionnaire only measured the responses of Honors students. To be able to better generalize about how the majority of students view the benefits of using primary sources all levels of learners in a more diverse area would need to be studied.

## Definition of Terms

**Sourcing** – “The practice of reading the source of the document before reading the actual text (Wineburg, 1991b, p.510).”

**Contextualization**- “The heuristic of attending to a detailed sequence of events in time and space when reconstructing events from documents” (Britt & Aglinskas 2010, p. 489).

**Corroboration**- The act of checking details from one source with another to try and get a better idea of the truth of the content.

**Critical Thinking** – “Critical thinking, as it is typically understood by educators has at least three features: it is done for the purpose of making up one’s mind about what to believe or do; the person engaging in the thinking is trying to fulfill standards of adequacy and accuracy appropriate to the thinking; and the thinking fulfills the relevant standards to some threshold level (Balin, Case, Coombs & Daniels, 1999, p 287).”

**Historical Inquiry**- “An instructional approach that brings together new understanding about the discipline of history as well as recent developments in cognitive research, especially in regard to children’s historical thinking” (Hartzler-Miller, 2001, p.672 as quoted in Friedman 2006, p. 125).

**Heuristics** – Method that enables a person to discover something for himself or herself.

## Methodology

All of the literature used in the writing of this paper was found via the Internet. I used ERIC, EBSCO, JSTOR, and Google Scholar to find all of the journal articles. I also linked up to Ohio Universities ALICE online to find additional resources. I searched key terms such as “archives”; “primary sources”; “critical thinking”, “historical inquiry”; “source-method”; “corroboration”; “secondary education”; “contextualization”; “sourcing”; in no particular order but all mismatched together in order to generate the articles I did.

## Summary

This Introduction outlined the importance of teaching what historians call a “new history.” The “new history” movement seeks to teach students to think historically and engage in critical thinking to better understand past events. The problem is that students are not motivated to learn and interested in history class because of traditional teaching methods that require the rote memorization of facts through the banking method of teaching. A new way to grab student’s attention in the classroom is needed and through the thoughtful use of primary sources students can make personal connections to history by mastering the heuristics used by historians. These personal connections and heuristics will help students to realize the importance of the past and to see history as important to their future. Singleton and Giese (1999) suggest that, “students should deal with primary sources so they can develop their own knowledge, skills, and predispositions (148).” They go on to argue that by using primary sources, “students are more likely to engage in asking questions, thinking critically, making reasoned inferences, and developing reasoned

explanations and interpretations of events and issues in the past and present (148).”

Chapter Two will review the literature on using primary sources in the classroom

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter reviews literature pertinent to understanding the effective use of primary sources and how they should be used in the classroom. Understanding how to effectively use primary sources offers an alternative to traditional teaching methods used widely in history class. Using primary sources forces students to engage in historical inquiry and critical thinking which are valuable skills to learn in order to be successful in the real world as productive democratic citizens. This chapter includes five sections centered on the following topics: 1) What children and researchers think about textbooks; 2) How can primary sources be used to promote historical inquiry; 3) How does a historian's knowledge about historical methods and processes differ from a novice's; 4) How primary sources foster critical thinking; 5) How teachers are currently using primary sources.

#### What children and researchers think about textbooks?

Textbooks have long been a staple of classroom instruction for history teachers and students. Textbooks compile historical events and stories complete with charts, maps, and primary sources into one book for students and teachers. The teachers editions come complete with CD-ROMs giving teachers suggested lesson plans, lecture slides, worksheets and tests to complement the information in the book. Textbooks are valuable as a resource because of the plethora of starting information for a lesson but there are a lot of factors that need to be taken into consideration when using a textbook. If everyday lessons and activities are to be structured out of the textbook it is important to add something different to the mix

that makes students think outside the box so they may realize how the textbook was actually created and that history is not definite but ever changing as more information is discovered or different perspectives are understood.

Korbin (1996) discusses how history textbooks have changed since the 1890's when an "emphasis on objectivity" replaced authors' intentions of creating textbooks meant to teach "moral" lessons to American youngsters by stretching the truth (p.4). Korbin argues that the emphasis on objectivity has since created "a tone of authority [that] pervades textbook narratives (p.4)" leading students to believe that "there is only one true and accurate account of the past (p.5)." Multiple other scholars see similar problems with textbooks. Peter Schrag, who has written various articles on school reform, argues that, "history textbooks are often written as if their authors did not exist at all, as if they were simply the instrument of a heavenly intelligence transcribing official truths (as quoted in Wineburg, 1991b, p.511)." Stahl, Hynd, Britton, McNish and Bosquet (1996) also found that textbooks were written with little voice from the author and furthermore that "interpretations of events are presented as fact, not analysis, and two or more interpretations to an event are rarely shared (p.448)." When students view the textbook as raw "truth" a very narrow understanding of history is represented. This narrow view of history leaves little room for interpretation from individuals with different perspectives on historical accounts in the minds of students from the dominant culture but it allows students to do well on multiple-choice test. Wineburg (1991b) has observed,

[...] the ability [among students] to do well on specially designed passages written by absentee authors, each passage self-contained and decontextualized from the discipline that gives it

meaning; the ability to respond correctly to multiple-choice questions that presume an unambiguous right answer; the familiarity with formats that disguise the facts that texts are written by human beings whose beliefs in eluctably creep into their prose; the skill at decoding literal as opposed to latent meaning; and the ability to process independent passages rather than creating intertextual connections across multiple texts. In short, reading comprehension becomes defined by the texts, by the readers, and by the measures we use to study it. (p.515)

The reason students view history textbooks as explaining “just the facts” is partly because the absence of hedges according to Wineburg (1991b). Hedges are words or phrases used to “allow for additional possibilities or to avoid an over precise commitment”. Words such as “often,” “usually” and “sometimes” are used as hedges to show uncertainty in authors’ statements. Wineburg (1991b) argues that, “Historians rely on hedges to indicate the indeterminacy of history to convey the sense that historical certainty is elusive at best (p.511).” So how are students supposed to evaluate bias and gain a sense of the context of the time period when every fact they learn seems like it is ingrained in stone and presented as fact by textbook authors?

Instead of puzzling over discrepancies between historical accounts and wondering what could have happened, students just look for the right answer and the thinking process ends when they find it. Students are not required to analyze and reflect on information, just regurgitate it. Davis and Klages (1997) found, as stated by Doppin (2000), “that teaching in the high school focuses on content rather

than process and consequently produces students who easily forget what they supposedly have learned (p.160).”

How primary sources are used to promote historical inquiry

According to Wineburg (1991a) historical inquiry is the process of collecting evidence for background knowledge, sourcing a document and considering bias (sourcing); checking the validity of the evidence (corroborating), and placing the document in “a concrete temporal and spatial context (contextualization) (p. 77)”. The next step is to evaluate the evidence to answer essential questions as well as form new ones that fill gaps in the readers’ knowledge to serve as a tentative hypothesis of how the events unfolded.

Sourcing a document means looking to the source of a document before reading it. Educators should teach students to want to know who wrote a document and think about possible motivations the author may have had in writing the piece while reading it so students can better understand the authors message. If anyone goes ahead and just reads the document and has no idea of whom or what time period it came from it would be easy to get a distorted view of the true meaning behind a document. It is important to look at even little things such as the time of year the document was written because every detail can add something to a historians understanding of the document. In considering bias Sean Lang (1993) found it is not important to find out if a source is biased but rather what the bias of a source is because “all sources have an in build bias (p. 13).” Lang goes on to discuss how exercises asking students to find the bias in documents are not constructive and suggest that bias is exactly what makes a source valuable. By understanding the

bias of a document the reader is able to make sound judgments about the validity of information.

After students have read a document that has been properly sourced in the time period they are ready to corroborate the information they learned in the document by comparing multiple accounts. By looking at multiple accounts of events, students begin to see that history is not constructed from one perspective but rather takes multiple eyewitness accounts of the same events to validate the facts. By understanding that people from different classes, races, and ethnicities hold different perspectives when looking at the same event, students should begin to see that history is open for interpretation and there is no right or easily solvable answer on controversial issues. Stahl et al. (1996) found that historical thinking doesn't occur after reading multiple texts alone. The main issue they found was that students lack the disciplinary and structural knowledge of history to evaluate sources like a historian which echoes Beyers (2008a) point that thinking processes need to be explicitly taught in classrooms.

Contextualization is “the act of placing an event in its proper context – within the web of personalities, circumstances, and occurrences that surrounds it [...]” (Reisman & Wineburg, 2008, p.202). By properly contextualizing a document teachers can make it easier for students to personalize history and get a clear view of the dynamics during the time period. Reisman and Wineburg (2008) also found “without an appreciation of context, history becomes flat and lifeless, a two – dimensional image that dwells in the shadows of an ever more vibrant present (p. 206).” By understanding the political, societal and the familial relationships between people in different time periods it is easier to make judgments about the reasons

why historical events took place. Also by looking at the documents as a unique piece of history students can begin to see the wide range of effects certain events or documents can have on people. Students are able to learn the skill of historical inquiry by carefully being taught the heuristics historians used to piece together the past. In order to understand the significance of the document not all questions asked of a document by historians are found in the text by the author. For this reason it is important understand “not what the text says, but what it does” (Wineburg, 1991b, p.498) in the larger context of the time period as an historical artifact.

Wineburg and Schneider (2010) found that top of the class AP student’s in high school were very capable of using higher order thinking skills of Blooms Taxonomy but lacked “the ability to think *historically* about the documents (p.58)”. One AP student from a private school, named Jacob interpreted the document about the founding of Discovery Day in 1892 incorrectly because he was “unable to see the document as a product of unique historical circumstances (Wineburg & Schneider, 2010, p.58)”. Jacob failed to see the political and social implications of the holiday and just thought of the day as revering Christopher Columbus. The difference between talented high school students and historians as highlighted by this passage is the heuristics and thought processes they use to first analyze then interpret the past.

## The difference between a historian and a student

The skills that separate very bright high school students and historians are not the amount of content knowledge they have built up but the skills and processes used to go about interpreting historical evidence (sources). Wineburg (1991b) studied the difference between how top AP high school students interpret text and how historians go about understanding and evaluating evidence. He found that “it is not the literal text, or even the inferred text (as that word is commonly used), that [a] historian comprehends, but the *subtext*, a text of hidden and latent meanings (p.498).” Wineburg also noted the difference between texts as “rhetorical artifacts” and “human artifacts”. Using the source as a rhetorical artifact allows for the reader to find the stated meaning in the document, or what the author wants to get through to the reader. Looking at the text as a human artifact allows the reader to understand “how texts frame reality and disclose information about their authors’ assumptions, world views, and beliefs (p.499).” It is how the author constructs the world around him or her, the personal references and attitudes he or she brings into his or her writing that gives the text meaning. This finding is similar to what Peter Seixas (1998) calls “documentary” and “worklike” aspects of the text. The documentary aspect of the text is what a person can gain by reading the text itself. The “worklike” aspects of the text are *part* of the action that is under investigation, not an *account* of the action (Seixas, 1998, p. 312).” Seixas goes on argue that, “in order to make sense of the “worklike” aspects of a text, one reads subtext, and makes inferences in relation to thoughts, intentions, and actions (p.312)” which is where the real meaning of the documents comes through. Wineburg (1991b) states,

Texts emerge as “speech acts,” social interactions set down on paper that can be understood only by trying to reconstruct the social context in which they occurred. The comprehension of text reaches beyond words and phrases to embrace intention, motive, purpose, and plan—the same set of concepts we use to decipher human action (p. 500).”

The problem is that students are not taught to evaluate the “worklike” subtext in primary sources as historians do that give emotion and vibrancy to the text.

Wineburg (1991b) found in his study that historians participated actively in the reading of evidence where as students did not. Historians “pretend to deliberate with others while talking to themselves,” acting as an “actual” and “mock” reader when examining a document. They have a constant conversation going on inside their heads about the possibilities of what the writer was saying and why and to whom he was saying it. To a historian “texts are not lifeless strings of facts, but the keys to unlocking the character of human beings, people with likes and dislikes, biases and foibles, airs and convictions (Wineburg, 1991b, p. 507).” One of the problems with students is that they do not comprehend the subtext in documents. They are unable see the human circumstances in the authors’ writings. “For students, reading history was not a process of puzzling about authors’ intentions or situating texts in a social world but of gathering information, with texts serving as bearers of information (Wineburg 1991b, p 510).” According to Wineburg students don’t use the sourcing, corroborating or contextualization heuristics as frequently as historians; where as for them “ the locus of authority was in the text; for historians, it was in the questions they themselves formulated about the text (Wineburg, 1991b, p.511).

## How primary sources foster critical thinking

“Though teachers might call themselves math teachers, or English teachers, or history teachers, they were really all engaged in the same process: teaching students to think” (Wineburg & Schneider, 2010, p.56)

Critical thinking is an important skill to master for any lifelong learner. When individuals become critical thinkers they tend to think about discrepancies more rationally and begin to see through the haze of half-truths and whole lies that pervade society as a whole and form their own opinions about issues. Critical thinking helps individuals to make decisions not based on emotion but on fact and reason. By teaching students to become better critical thinkers we can help to develop more tolerant, open-minded individuals who avoid snap judgments and recognize the relevance of others’ assumptions and life experiences. Critical thinkers practice historical inquiry because they are skeptic of sources and look to be active instead of passive readers and thinkers that ask questions about the reliability and validity of information they are told. Teaching multiple perspectives helps students develop critical thinking skills that will engage them in historical inquiry.

Critical thinking “is in some sense good thinking. It is the quality of thinking, not the processes of thinking, which distinguishes critical from uncritical thinking (Bailin, Case, Coombs, & Daniels 1999, p. 288).” Bailin et al. (1999) argues that, “critical thinking often requires imagining possible consequences, generating original approaches and identifying alternative perspectives (p.288). Critical thinking is an important skill that goes hand and hand with historical inquiry and both skills need to be taught in classrooms. Bailin et al. (1999) list five kinds of

intellectual resources that are necessary to characterize a critical thinker; “background knowledge, operational knowledge of the standards of good thinking; knowledge of key critical concepts; heuristics (strategies, procedures, etc.); and habits of mind (p.290).” The first four of these strategies can be taken face value for their importance to critical thinking and historical inquiry. Habits of mind needs to be taken into consideration because “one must also have certain commitments, attitudes or habits of mind that dispose him or her to use these resources to fulfill relevant standards and principles of good thinking (Bailin et al., 1999, p.294).” The following are some habits of mind Bailin et al. (1999) found to be conducive to critical thinking:

- *respect for reasons and truth* (commitment to having justified beliefs, values and actions);
- *respect for high-quality products and performances* (appreciation of good design and effective performance);
- *an inquiring attitude* (inclination to assess the support for judgments one is asked to accept);
- *open-mindedness* (disposition to withhold judgment and seek new evidence or points of view when existing evidence is inadequate or contentious, and willingness to revise one’s view should the evidence warrant it);
- *fair-mindedness* (commitment to understanding and giving fair consideration to alternative points of view, disposition to seek evidence or reasons that may tell against one’s view);

- *independent mindedness* (possession of the intellectual honesty and courage necessary for seeking out relevant evidence and basing one's beliefs and actions on it, despite pressure or temptations to do otherwise, and the personal strength to stand up for one's firmly grounded beliefs);
- *respect for others in group inquiry and deliberation* (commitment to open, critical discussion in which all persons are given a fair hearing and their feelings as well as their interest are taken into account);
- *respect for legitimate intellectual authority* (appreciation of importance of giving due weight to the views of persons who satisfy the criteria for being an authority in a relevant area of study and practice; and
- *an intellectual work-ethic* (commitment to carrying out relevant thinking tasks in a competent manner) (p. 294-295).

In one way or another all of the intellectual resources needed for critical thinking differentiate the thinking processes of historians and highly talented students. Historians understand that it is impossible to divorce the source from the time period. That is why they use the heuristics of sourcing and contextualization. They realize they cannot take the authors text as truth but rather corroborate the facts with other accounts to come up with a tentative history. By using primary sources teachers can help to teach students the intellectual resources needed to become critical thinkers by using multiple accounts to research the past. Historians know that “documents are never just free-floating bits of information waiting for their

meaning to be discovered; their significance derives from the questions historians ask about them (Cleary & Neumann, 2009, p. 74).” In forming these questions it is important not only to participate in critical thinking but also historical inquiry that is a more defined version of critical thinking used in uncovering history.

#### How teachers are currently using primary sources

Ken Osborne breaks down the negatives of traditional history teaching in his article *Archives in the Classroom* (1987). Osborne found that students were bored by historical study and found it to be dull, uninteresting and tendentious; students thought it “overemphasized political, constitutional, and military history at the expense of social, economic and cultural themes; they thought that it relied too much on memorization instead of understanding and dealt with a large period of time that allowed for little in-depth study of history, making the passive role of the student boring. Finally, Osborne found that students disliked listening to lectures and taking notes and had trouble making connections with the history in their books and the world around them (p.11).” According to Osborne one priority of the new history was developing the skills of research, investigation, and analysis so students understand how to use history to develop ideas. He also advocated that students should not only “learn history” but also “do” history. Finally Osborne suggest that traditional methods of teaching needed to be replaced “with student-centered activity-based methods, usually described by the words discover or inquiry (p.19).”

Teachers still do not use primary sources as much as they should in the classroom now that we have entered the digital age. Primary sources used to be

hard to find but with the diffusion of Internet use it is now possible to easily find multiple resources. Cohen and Rosenzweig (2006) found that a “120gb hard drive can fit the same amount of information that a 120,000 volume library can (as quoted in Messengale, 2008, p. 140).” A study by Friedman (2006) found that, “those who had better access to technology used them [primary sources] more and that access to more technology not technical skill was the main factor in how they used technology (as quoted in Messengale, 2006, p. 140).” Despite findings that support greater use of primary source documents, classroom teachers still often rely on the textbook as the only source of information for their students (VanSledright, 2008, p. 117).

One problem with using primary sources according to Milton (1993) is that “students’ critical thinking skills tend to be largely undeveloped when they arrive in high school, presumably because pre-secondary social studies education emphasizes memorization (as quoted in Phillis, 2006, p. 121). This makes it difficult to jump into an exercise using primary sources. The heuristics and critical thinking skills mentioned above need to be taught in combination with using source material in order for teaching with primary sources to have value in the classroom. Learning from a textbook instead of multiple sources leads students to view the textbook as the “most trustworthy” source of information (Wineburg, 1991b).

Keveryn (2009), in doing a study about how teachers in one North Carolina School district used primary sources, found that the teachers in her sample utilize primary sources for five primary reasons: “To develop students’ historical empathy, establish connections; provide credibility and validity; support standards; and to build historical reasoning skills, such as argumentation (p. 52-53).” Keveryn’s five

reasons for using primary sources are very similar to the four reasons Barton (2005) outlined. Barton argued for using primary sources to motivate historical inquiry; supply evidence for historical accounts; to convey information about the past; and to provide insight into the thought and experiences of people in the past. Although these are all very good reasons to use primary sources teachers need to adapt the use of primary sources to teach students broader thinking and writing skills and allow them to “do history”. Additionally Keveryn found that when teachers do use primary sources, “they provide soft and hard scaffolding to help their students draw meaning from the document (p.54).” Although teachers are using primary sources they still refuse to let go of the textbook and the primary sources presented in them. According to Lapp, Grigg and Tay-Lim (2002) “it is rare for time to be spent reasoning about the past, writing extended answers to historical questions, or reading primary and secondary sources (as quoted in Vansledright, 2008, p. 129).” Lee, Doolittle and Hicks (2006) study reported, “teachers generally used non-digital, rather than digital, collections of historical primary sources (p.299).”

The problem with this is:

“textbook-based sources are typically short or excerpted and not set within the historical milieu of the original document. In addition when historical primary sources were used, they were used more often as evidence of key individuals, events, and ideas, and to a much lesser extent for comparing and contrasting details across multiple sources or evaluating the credibility, authority, authenticity, and completeness

of primary sources – central elements of historical inquiry (Wineburg, 1991; Seixas 2000; as quoted in Lee, Doolittle & Hicks, 2006, p. 299)

Teachers in this study reported external reasons for not using primary sources such as needing “more computers with access to the web, more time in the curriculum for the use of historical primary sources, and less standardized testing (Lee et al., p. 299).” Overall most of the research points to changing the ways that history is taught instead of using primary sources more often. Primary sources need to be used for the purpose of creating good “habits of mind” and thinking skills, not to give a narrow and pointed view of the issue being discussed. Lee et al., (2006) also found that “neither digital nor non-digital historical primary sources will have a major impact in the social studies or history classroom until teachers make more active use of the sources themselves (p.299).

### Summary

This chapter discussed the research literature on using primary sources in the classroom. The research literature suggests that students dislike the use of textbooks because they have little voice; everything is presented as fact; and students have trouble making personal connections. The benefits of using primary sources have been shown when used properly but still there is a lack of their use in the classroom. Many teachers are still using a more traditional approach to history education, favoring lecture and note taking. This is possibly because that’s the way history was taught to them or because it just feels like there is too much information to be taught. Primary sources can help teach the skills of historical inquiry and critical

thinking because they contain hedges and allow students to construct their own history instead of telling them “just the facts” as the book does.

Educators need to teach the heuristics of sourcing, collaboration, and contextualization so students can become better at historical inquiry and critical thinking. By understanding the heuristics needed to define historical accounts accurately historians are able to see what the text does instead of just what it says. Historians look for the subtext, or what Seixas called the “worklike aspects” of a document where as students concentrated on more “documentary aspects” to gain an understanding of the text. Historians also more frequently used the heuristics necessary to historical understanding and therefore were able to develop a more accurate and acceptable account of history.

Critical thinking is promoted by the use of primary sources because it gives students discrepant accounts of history and allows them to analyze different viewpoints through debate or questioning one another. Critical thinking as mentioned above is in a sense good thinking and by teaching historical inquiry one step at a time students will be able to better deal with adversity in school and their lives. Overall the literature suggests that using primary sources in student-based activities may be the key to getting students involved and interested in learning history once again.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Research and Design*

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of how primary sources affect a student's ability to think critically and historically. The review of the literature discussed how teachers are currently using primary sources and how a student's knowledge about historical processes differs from expert historical thinking and problem solving. Data was collected for this Masters Research Project by using a questionnaire to provide demographic information; data about the attitudes of students towards primary sources; and open-ended questions about students use of primary sources. The findings of this study will add to the research about how students perceive the use of primary sources and the processes they use to evaluate them.

#### *Participants.*

The study took place at a rural high school in southeastern Ohio. Fifty-one students from two 9<sup>th</sup> grade honors American History classes participated in the study. The students ranged in age from 14 to 16 years with the average age being 15. 98% of the students in the sample identified themselves as being white. 4% of that 98% said they were of mixed ethnicity. The high school in this study served approximately 1,232 daily students according to the 2009-2010 state School Report Card. According to the same report card from the Ohio Department of Education website, 46.8% of the students at the school were economically disadvantaged.

The students who participated in this study were at the top of their class and the cooperating teachers opinion was that all of them would be able to pass the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT). There was little to no use of multiple documents in their classes to cover the same topic from different perspectives. Occasionally primary sources were used in the classroom to back up what the textbook said; rarely were they used for general learning and thinking experiences. The focus of history instruction and assessment was predominantly based on taking notes, completing readings, filling out worksheets and taking test. This appeared to be a trend in the history classes at the school as older students suggested that primary sources were barely used throughout their high school career.

During my time at the school as a student teacher I followed the same method as the cooperating teacher and based most of my assessments on test and worksheet grades. Those grades were solely based on the information that was presented through lectures and textbook readings. It was the way that I was taught in high school and what I perceived as an efficient way to get students to understand the information since I only had nine weeks to teach them the expected amount of information. I included some primary sources because I liked the way my teachers in college used them to make me think about issues but for the most part I had a limited understanding of how to teach with primary sources. I used primary sources such as war posters and political cartoons in my lectures and in class activities to try to get students involved in the lessons. I split them into separate groups with different political cartoons or war posters and asked them to explain the specific era they were assigned and what larger issues the posters/cartoons explained. Next we had a group discussion about how these cartoons illustrated the thinking of the era

we were discussing at the time. While at the high school I used the PAPER acronym with students to serve as a guide when evaluating excerpts of primary text. PAPER stands for purpose; argument; presuppositions and values; epistemology; and relate to other texts. This was good for the students because it gave them a guide and something to look for when evaluating a primary source. We used an excerpt from *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair that portrayed the grisly conditions of the meat packing industry. This was the only primary source I pulled to be used as an activity because I was unable to figure out how to use my time to get through the material and still expect the student to explore broader issues.

### *Setting*

The high school facility was built relatively recently and is set up in a T-shape with two adjoining wings. There are two stories along the T-shape building where most of the core curriculum classes were taught. The two wings contained the athletic department and cafeteria in one wing and the fine arts and elective classes in the other. Teachers in the same departments were in near proximity of each other but sometimes, in the case of the history department, spread out between the two floors.

The classroom itself was close to the same wing that the gym and cafeteria were and it was set up in was a square with rows of desk from the front to the back of the room. All around the room on the walls there were posters of different continents and countries that were used throughout lectures to illustrate relationships and distances between countries. In the back of the classroom students had assigned locations where they were expected to turn in their notebooks so they could be checked for credit upon the completion of a unit.

### *Data Collection*

The students were given a questionnaire that contained both quantitative and qualitative response questions (see Appendix A) around a month after my student teaching experience was completed. The first three questions, in section one of the questionnaire pertained to student demographics. The following 20 questions in the second section of the questionnaire used a Likert Scale to gather data about students' uses of the sourcing, contextualization and corroboration heuristics. Additional questions were asked at the beginning of the section in questions 1-3 to measure students' ability and affinity for social studies. This data will represent the qualitative data for this study.

In an attempt to understand how students think about history the participants in the third section of the survey were asked extended response questions about primary sources and their use. They were asked to define a primary source and what types of documents can be classified as primary sources. They were also asked to describe the process they would use to evaluate a primary source and whether they thought primary sources helped them to better understand historical events. Finally the students were asked about how they felt about history class in general compared to other classes and if they felt engaged in the classroom.

Questions 23-26 were omitted from the analysis as some students unexpectedly discussed these items with each other. These questions asked students to explain what political cartoons or war posters they could remember covering during my time student teaching and specifically what one political cartoon was illustrating that we covered in my time at the school. Their discussion defeated

the purpose of the questions to accurately measure recall about primary sources they had covered earlier in the time I was present teaching.

### *Data Analysis*

As mentioned previously, questions 3-20 in the second section of the questionnaire used a Likert scale method of data collection to measure students' attitudes about using primary sources. The questionnaire asked students to rank statements about primary sources using a five-point scale ranging from strongly disagrees to strongly agree. Once the data was gathered it was entered into an Excel sheet and the mean, standard deviation and percentages of student responses were calculated to determine whether there were any correlations between the students' answers (See Appendix B). ANOVA was not used because there was no control group. Consequently, thoughtful observation of the results was my primary method of analysis. This involved determining correlations within the research literature and ascertaining whether the data did or did not suggest the use of the sourcing, contextualization and corroboration heuristics. The students' answers were scored using a value of 5 for answers of "strongly agree" and a value of 1 for "strongly disagrees". The students' answers to questions 3-20 were summed together using the above value system as suggested by Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh (2002) (see Appendix C) where a summative score of 100 indicates students' strongly agreed with the questions and the lower the score the less in agreement students were with the questions about primary sources.

Section three of the questionnaire asked open-ended questions in order to gain a deeper understanding of students' thought processes and attitudes towards the use of primary sources. All answers, except for the excluded questions, were

combined in a Word document and analyzed to determine themes across student responses as suggested by Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh (2002; see Appendix D).

Responses were counted using a tallying method in which I identified key words and phrases. Students could have multiple tallies even though they only gave one answer because their answer contained elements of two different categories; subsequently, they were scored accordingly. Because students could have two or three different elements in their answers the percentages did not always add up to 100%. Because percentages will not always add up to 100% the percentage is not reflective of the actual number of students who demonstrated that specific knowledge. Therefore in this section the number of times a response was made will not be presented in percentage form because it misrepresents the information and makes it look like a higher percentage of students represent each answer. The reality is that it one student's answer contained multiple knowledgeable and thoughtful responses where as some students answers did not contain one knowledgeable response. Both section one and two data use numbers instead of names to identify students in order to protect anonymity. Chapter four will discuss the findings further.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

#### Preference for History

The students were given a survey to discover their knowledge about using primary sources one month after I completed my student teaching. The survey asked students about their performance in social studies as well as whether they liked the subject. The mean was 3.4 (see Appendix B, Question 1), suggesting that on average the students in this study were rather neutral in their likes towards social studies. For the purpose of reporting the findings in this study the data stating whether or not students “strongly agree” or “agree”, “strongly disagree” or “disagree”, were combined into “agree” and “disagree”. Only 51% of the students agreed with the statement that they liked social studies. Out of the 51 students who responded to this question 80% of the students indicated they made good grades in social studies (see Appendix B, Question 2). When asked whether they thought history consisted of a “bunch of facts” they have to memorize that don’t really relate to their lives, 70% of the students answered that they disagreed..

The quantitative section of the questionnaire included several questions about the use of primary sources. When asked whether they were more interested in the lesson when primary sources were used, 45% of students responded they were whereas 39% indicated that they were neutral towards using primary sources. Only 16% of students reported being less interested in the lesson when using primary sources (see Appendix B, Question 3). When asked whether primary sources helped them to better understand historical events rather than reading from a textbook, 59% agreed that they did (see Appendix B, Question 4). This

correlates with the finding that 53% of the students did not find reading about historical events from a textbook interesting or exciting (see Appendix B, Question 14). When asked whether or not they enjoyed participating in small group activities, 67% of students agreed that they did, while 20% did not (see Appendix B, Question 18).

#### Sourcing, Contextualization and Corroboration

In the quantitative section of the questionnaire the participating students were asked about their own use of the sourcing heuristic. When asked whether it is possible to have an unbiased source their responses varied. While 39% agreed that it was possible to have an unbiased source, 39% of students did not (see Appendix B, Question 20). The findings to this question also revealed the largest disagreement amongst students with a standard deviation of 1.371 (see Appendix B, Question 20). A possible explanation might be that the students in this study had not been taught how to evaluate the subtext, or what Seixas (1998) and Wineburg (1991b) have described as the “worklike” or “human artifacts” of primary sources.

To understand which parts of the sourcing heuristic the students in this study used they were asked whether it is important to know who the author is of a primary source, with which 57% agreed (see Appendix B, Question 5). When asked whether it is important to know where a primary source is written, 55% of students agreed whereas 23% of students disagreed (see Appendix B, Question 6). The last sourcing question asked whether when reading a primary source it is important to think about the reliability of the author. Thirty-seven percent of the students agreed it was important while 39% disagreed and 24% remained neutral (see Appendix B, Question 15). A possible explanation for this finding may be that when these

students have encountered documents in the past these documents were used merely to illustrate what the teacher wanted them to know. If this were the case, presumably they may have never been asked to evaluate discrepant documents and assess the reliability of their author[s]. The students' responses to the above four questions confirm Wineburg's (1991b) finding that students do not use heuristics as frequently as historians do, which he found to affect the way they understand primary documents. The data shows that less than 60% of students actively use the sourcing heuristic when reading primary sources.

The next section of questions addressed the heuristic of contextualization which involves "attending to a detailed sequence of events in time and space when reconstructing events from documents (Britt & Aglinskis 2010, p. 489). When the students were asked whether it is important to know at what point in time a primary document was written, 88% of the students agreed (see Appendix B, Question 7). When asked whether it is important to understand the author's perspective, 69% of respondents agreed (see Appendix B, Question 8).

The only question about corroboration asked the students whether they think about explanations for historical events from multiple perspectives. The mean score of 3.33 [SD: 1.125] suggests they were rather neutral. While 55% suggested they consider multiple perspectives, 27% said they did not (see Appendix B, Question 17).

## Critical Thinking

This section of questions sought to determine the students' ability to apply critical thinking skills to analyze primary sources. Chapter Two discussed that, "critical thinking often requires imagining possible consequences, generating original approaches and identifying alternative perspectives (Balin et al. 1999, p.288)." This definition helped guide formulating these questions.

The students were asked whether using primary sources allows them to "see" history for themselves. Many of the students (41%) were unsure about this question and provided a neutral response while 33% of respondents agreed (see Appendix B, Question 11). This finding appears to suggest that most students were disposed towards "finding the right answer" rather finding personal meaning from the provided sources.

The next question sought to determine whether the students thought that history was ingrained in stone or open to interpretation. Asked whether they thought of history as pieces of a puzzle that need to be put together, 25% of students remained neutral, whereas 37% agreed. Exactly the same percentage (37%) disagreed (see Appendix B, Question 13), which suggests that many of the students in this study continued to not understand that history is tentative and does not consist of simply the "raw" facts.

When students were asked whether they thought about how historical events could have unfolded differently and how they might have acted themselves in a given situation, 55% of students said that they did try to do so whereas 27% of students did not. This question meant to assess the students' ability to empathize with individuals in the past and to determine whether they deliberated with

themselves when thinking about historical situations as Wineburg (1991b) found historians do when they act as an “actual” and “mock” reader while examining documents. The responses to this question appear to affirm the importance of demonstrating to students how to read and think about primary sources. Only slightly more than half of the students [55%] indicated they try to empathize with the historical situation.

### Analysis of Student Agreement

The summative analysis of the quantitative data in Appendix B is presented in a separate appendix [see Appendix C] to report the students’ levels of agreement with the questions presented in the quantitative section of the questionnaire. A value of (5) means they strongly agreed that evaluating and using primary sources is important. Some of the questions asked student for their preferences about using primary sources. Full agreement with all questions is presented as equal to a value of 100. The average score was 68.549 (SD: 8.762) (see Appendix C) suggesting that slightly more than two thirds of the students thought using primary sources is important. . The scores ranged from 44 to 82. Finally, more male students [70.03%] than female students [66.43%] agreed using primary sources is important.

### Qualitative Results

Section Three of the questionnaire asked the students to respond to open-ended questions. When asked what a primary source is their responses varied slightly (see Appendix D, Question 21). A typical response to defining a primary source was that it was written by someone who was present during the event and experienced it first-hand. Forty-six out of the 51 students presented some variation on this response while three students also added in their responses that primary

sources are “usually biased.” The remaining five students’ responses were unique (see Appendix D, Question 21). One student said that a primary source was, “A worksheet that tries to put you in the place of others to better understand the topic.” Another student said, “A primary source is a source that you use for information. It is usual, the first, and main source.” These responses might well be due to the fact that the students may have never read a primary source in its entirety and never been given multiple sources at a time to analyze. Another student said, “A primary source is a document that illustrates certain perspectives from specific time periods.” The remaining two students wrote that, “A primary source is a source that goes straight for the person;” and that, “A primary source is a source that is primary to the reader.” This final response may be one of the best answers if the student actually meant that a primary source can be anything that is used to answer the questions formulated by the researcher as the context in which the source is used determines whether it is primary.

Next the students were asked what types of documents are classified as primary sources (see Appendix D, Question 22). “Journal” and “diary” were the most prevalent answers. Thirty-five out of 51 students provided an answer that included either “journals” or “diaries” or both. Journals were listed 26 times whereas diaries were listed 20 times. Thirteen students listed “letters” and “newspapers” as a primary source as well while nine students listed “eyewitness accounts” as forms of primary sources. Finally, six students listed “autobiographies,” while “articles” and “encyclopedias” were listed twice each. Although multiple lessons included the use of pictures or some form of media, “pictures” and “videotapes” were both merely listed

twice. The findings suggest that the students in this study continued to think of primary sources as only being in a written format.

When asked whether primary sources help to better understand historical events, 18 students said that primary sources help show others' points of views (see Appendix D, Question 27). For example, one student [S41] said, "They can give you a point of view from the person who was actually there instead of something in a history book." Another participant [S4] wrote, "Primary sources can show alternate points of view. They can explain events in a way that feels more personalized and less general." These two students responses are representative of the 18 students who indicated that primary sources offer another point of view. The second student's [S4] answer included two separate responses. While he/she indicated that primary sources can show alternate points of view they also state that primary sources can "explain events in a way that feels more personalized and less in general." A total of six students responded that primary sources helped them to better understand historical events by personalizing the information (see Appendix D, Question 27). Ten students thought primary sources showed the reader "what really happened" (see Appendix D, Question 27). While one participant [S10] suggested, "They give more information of what really happened," another [S13] indicated, "They give you an understanding of what really happened." These responses suggest the students in this study believed that primary sources show you what really happened whereas history textbooks offer little voice from the author and present history as fact. Five students indicated that primary sources don't help them to better understand primary sources. Two students [S12; S14] simply stated, "they don't" and one student [S49] responded, "I don't think they do."

Another student [S28] said, “I don’t think I do because I feel they’re hard to understand.” Finally, another student [S19] said, “they make you live the moment or at least try. Personally I don’t think that they provide much information. I think the power point notes cover it much better.” The most complete answer offered by one of the participants [S2], was:

“Primary sources can sometimes help me better understand historical events by giving me an inside look into someone’s perspective on what was going on in the world. It also gives me an idea of what people thought of issues and how they felt it would affect their lives. However, when you read a source it is important to read other sources of conflicting ideas so you can form your own idea of what was going on during that time, not just one person’s point of view which is usually biased.”

This student’s response reflects the heuristics of historical thinking.

However, his/her response was atypical. He/she was the only one to mention collaboration and one of two to mention bias. This finding suggest agreement with Beyers’ (2008a) conclusion that thinking processes need to be explicitly taught in classrooms.

Next, the students were asked to explain how they would go about evaluating a primary source (see Appendix D, Question 28). The most commonly listed heuristic was sourcing. It was listed by 14 of the 51 of the students. One participant [S20] indicated he/she would evaluate a primary source by figuring out “who wrote it, where they lived, what time period, events happening.” Another participant [S31] said. “If I had a primary source I would first evaluate it by seeing who the author

was. Next, I would look for the date and time that the primary source was written. Then finally I would go through and read the primary source completely.” These low response rates, however, suggest a lack of understanding about the heuristics necessary to evaluate primary sources.

Another heuristic listed by the students was checking for bias. Eight students mentioned they would check for bias. One participant [S39] said: “I could check for bias. I would see how much details was important and from what position the person was speaking.” Six students mentioned the heuristic of contextualization in their answers (see Appendix D, Question 28). One student [S3] said: “I would take into account the political and social problems, the author’s background, and the author’s biases.” By taking into account the political and social problems these students demonstrated they are contextualizing by thinking about the events that led to the document being produced.

The final heuristic, corroboration, was listed least. None of the students mentioned corroborating the original document to determine whether another author or participant could verify the account. The closest a student [S2] came to mentioning corroboration as part of his answer, wrote: “... I would then go and try to find another piece that has opposing ideas and try to form my own idea”. Two students said that they wouldn’t evaluate primary sources at all because they are boring and six students chose to give no answer or wrote an answer that was illegible. Interestingly, three students wrote they would read primary sources to find answers. One student [S48] said, “You read it and go back to the question to answer then,” and another student [S47] said, “[you] read it and use it to answer questions.” This finding suggests the students remained in a work sheet mode by

“finding the answers” rather than reading for meaning. Finally, 21 students offered answers that included none of the heuristics (see Appendix D, Question 28), suggesting further that students in this study failed to understand the necessary steps to evaluate primary sources.

The final question asked the students whether they felt engaged in their history class in comparison to in other classes. Nineteen students said they felt engaged in their history class (see Appendix D, Question 29). Out of these 19 students who answered affirmatively, seven stated they felt engaged because they liked history. Two students stated they liked history because they liked a lecture format. One student said that he/she felt engaged in history class compared to others because he/she liked primary sources. Another student liked the memorization that was involved in the history class and one liked the many details he was given about history. Yet another student said he/she felt engaged in the history class because he/she liked note taking. Two students said they felt engaged in the history class because they have more conversations in this class than others and one student felt the class was easier to understand than others. Out of the final three students who said they felt engaged in history class, two students said it was because it “enables them to make good decisions about their future and not repeat mistakes from the past”. The final student said he/she felt engaged “because this is a class about what actually happened, it’s not theory, nor pure application, but it can predict future events.” In contrast 22 students said they did not feel engaged in the history class (see Appendix D, Question 29). Nine Students said that they did not feel engaged because they found the subject boring. One student wrote his/her reason for not feeling engaged was because history was his/her least favorite subject and

another student simply wrote he/she didn't like school. Five students said they didn't feel engaged because they had to take too many notes. For example, one student [S23] wrote, "We just sit there, have to scribble things (notes) down so you can't really focus and it's boring. Find fun ways to teach it. I am a kinesthetic learner which means I learn by doing and drawing with my hands and seeing." Two other students reasoned that they didn't feel engaged in the history class because there just wasn't enough discussion while another stated he/she simply didn't care about history. The final three students each listed their individual reasons as not being able to stay focused, not liking memorization, or too much lecture. Seven out of the eight students who indicated that they sometimes felt engaged in the history class stated that it depended on the topic they were covering while one student also added that it depended on how tired he/she was in the morning. The remaining student out of the eight who indicated they sometimes felt engaged in history class said he/she felt involved when the class did activities.

### Summary

About half the students in this study [51%] suggested they like social studies. When asked whether they were more interested in the lesson when using primary sources slightly less than half [45%] said they were, whereas nearly two-fifths [39%] had no preference. About one sixth [16%] of the students reported being less interested in the lesson when using primary sources. When asked whether primary sources helped them to better understand events rather than reading about them in a textbook nearly three-fifths [59%] of students felt they did whereas 53% of students felt reading historical events from a textbook was interesting.

The study showed that less than three-fifths of the students use the sourcing heuristic and that more than three-fifths (61%) of students failed to understand that all sources have biased. The study also found that nearly two-fifths [39%] do not think about the reliability of the author when reading a document compared to a nearly similar fraction [37%] that does. This was especially interesting because more than two-thirds [69%] indicated they believe it is important to understand the author's perspective.

The students' responses to the open ended questions suggest that they typically thought of a primary source as written by someone who was present during the event and experienced it first-hand. The students also demonstrated that they do not readily think of other forms of media besides print when they were asked what types of documents were classified as primary sources. The most widely listed forms of primary sources were journals and diaries although letters and newspapers were also mentioned.

When asked whether primary sources help them better understand historical events, more than one-third of students thought they did because they help to show others' points of view. One-fifth of the students also suggested that they helped them to better understand historical events because they provide more information about "what really happened." Less than one-third of the students exhibited using any of the heuristics required for historical thinking when asked how they would evaluate a primary source. The most frequently mentioned heuristic was sourcing was listed by slightly more than one-fourth of the students.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS

Consistent with the studies discussed in the literary review, students in this study indicated that they were bored with traditional teaching methods that emphasize listening to lectures, taking copious amounts of notes and reading from the textbook. Slightly more than half the students in this study indicated that they found reading events from a textbook uninteresting. This suggests that something needs to be changed in the way history is taught. The literature revealed that students found history to be boring because the history texts were written with little voice from the author and accounts of history were presented as fact instead of as tentative understandings of the past (Korbin 1996; Stahl et al. 1996; Wineburg 1991b). Many students agreed that primary sources helped them to better understand historical events. This finding implies that using primary sources might well be an important factor in influencing students' interest in history as it allows them to "do history".

The study also found that most students did not make use of the heuristics commonly used by historians to understand historical events. When asked about "sourcing" a document, slightly more than half of the students thought it was important to know who the author of a document was and slightly more than one-third thought it was important to think about its reliability. This is a problem because when students fail to appreciate bias and reliability, they are unable to make informed judgments. As Lang (1993) has pointed out, it is not important finding out whether a source is biased but rather, "what is this source's bias, and

how does it add to our picture of the past (p.10).” If students can begin to understand that everything has a reason for being written, just as words have a reason for being spoken, they will begin to understand that all forms of transmitted information have some sort of bias.

When asked about their use of the contextualization heuristic the nearly nine out of ten agreed that it is important to understand at what point in time a document was created. Hopefully students are using that information to gain a better understanding of how the time period can affect the way they view the information. More than two-thirds also agreed that it was important to know the authors’ perspective.

The findings also indicate that less than three-fifths of students in this study tried to think of different explanations for historical events. Historians, according to Wineburg (1991b), form their own questions to fill gaps about what they know whereas students instead of asking their own questions look to the text alone for answers. Similar to the Wineburg & Schneider’s study (2010), the finding in this study shows that students appear to lack the ability to think historically due to their limited use of the heuristics used by historians to understand the past. This finding may well be a result of failed teaching practices by this researcher who learned just how difficult it is to cover content and, as a student teacher, learn how to interact with a class of students while explicitly demonstrating and assessing students’ understanding of how to use primary sources. However, this study has led to an understanding of what does and does not work when using primary sources to help students develop historical inquiry skills. Bailin et al. (1999) found “open-mindedness” to be conducive to critical thinking as it involves having a “disposition

to withhold judgment and seek new evidence or points of view when existing evidence is inadequate or contentious, and [the] willingness to revise one's view should the evidence warrant it (p. 294)." Approximately three-fifths of the students failed to exhibit this habit of mind. Another "habit of mind" Bailin et al. (1999) found conducive to critical thinking was an "inquiring attitude" which involves having an "inclination to assess the support for judgments one is asked to accept (p. 294)." To exhibit critical thinking the researcher sought to have a high number of students who could empathize and show they thought through the evidence they were asked to evaluate. Instead, it became apparent that they did not think of alternate explanations to form their own questions about events as historians do. This is not only a problem as it relates to historical inquiry but also in life. If students are unable to decipher the half-truths and whole lies they are told through advertisements, campaign adds, and lobbyist groups the ideas that guide their lives are bound to make them confused, unsure and unjustified in their convictions.

The open-ended questions students were asked to answer revealed a limited and narrow understanding of what constitutes a primary source. This may well have been a failure on my part to make it clear to the students as to what characteristics define a primary source.

The fact that merely one-fifth of students thought primary sources shows them what really happened does not necessarily make the case for a better textbook but rather for better teaching methods to help students understand history.

Less than one third of students mentioned using sourcing, suggesting perhaps its limited use by previous and current teachers. Historically, it appears primary sources haven't been used to support historical inquiry but rather to

support apriori interpretations. As Wilson & Wineburg (2001) found, "... less successful teachers construct activities in which students encounter documents for a much more narrow and restricted set of purposes, such as illustrating an idea or event, or finding the author's bias (as quoted in Tally & Goldberg, 2005, p.2). This implies that future social studies teachers may need to be taught how to specifically use primary sources for historical inquiry. Research conducted by Doppen (2000) and Yeager and Wilson (1997) affirms this point as they found that when a social studies methods course emphasizes historical inquiry and analysis, student teachers tend to incorporate historical thinking activities in their teaching.

APPENDIX A

STUDENT SURVEY

**Please answer the following questions by circling what applies to you:**

- 1. My age is: 12 13 14 15 16 17 18
- 2. My gender is: male female
- 3. My ethnic group is: white black Hispanic Asian Indian multi

**Please circle the number that best corresponds to your beliefs:**

(1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, (5) strongly agree.

- 1. I like social studies.  
1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5
- 2. I usually make good grades in social studies.  
1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5
- 3. When we use primary sources in the classroom I am more interested in what the lesson is about.  
1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5
- 4. Primary sources help me to better understand historical events than reading about them in the textbook.  
1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5
- 5. When I read a primary source it is important to know who the author is.  
1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5
- 6. When I read a primary source it is important to know where it was written.  
1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5

7. When I read a primary source it is important to know at what point in time it was written.  
1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5
8. When I read a primary source the most important thing to understand is the author's perspective.  
1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5
9. I feel like history is just a bunch of pointless facts I have to memorize that really don't relate to my life.  
1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5
10. When reading about historical events I try to imagine as if I were participating in them to gain a better understanding.  
1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5
11. Using primary sources allow me to "see" history for myself.  
1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5
12. When reading a primary source I think about how when it was written affects the way I understand it.  
1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5
13. I like to think of history as pieces of a puzzle that need put together.  
1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5
14. I generally find reading about historical events from the textbook interesting and exciting.  
1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5
15. When reading a primary source I want to think about the reliability of its author before I read the source.  
1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5
16. I try and think of other possible explanations for a historical event from different perspectives.  
1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5

17. I think about how historical events could unfold and how I would act in that given situation.

1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5

18. I enjoy small group activities that allow me to bounce ideas off of other people.

1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5

19. When reading a primary source I think about why it was created.

1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5

20. It is possible to have an unbiased source.

1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5

**Please answer questions 20-23 in 2-3 complete sentences.**

21. What is a primary source?

22. What types of documents are classified as primary sources?

23. Explain to me your favorite lesson, in-class activity, or take home assignment over the course of this year. Why did you enjoy it?

24. What political cartoons or war posters do you remember from this year?

**Please answer questions 24-27 in no less than 50 words.**

25. Who wrote *The Jungle* and what was *The Jungle* about? Why was this document influential?

26. What specifically did you learn from this political cartoon?



27. How do primary sources help you to better understand historical events?

28. Explain how you would go about evaluating a primary source.

29. Do you usually feel engaged in the lesson during history class compared to other classes? Explain why or why not?

Appendix B  
Quantitative Analysis of Student Responses

Question #	SD	Mean	%SA/A	%SD/D	%N
Q1: I Like Social Studies.	1.1826	3.3725	51%	24%	25%
Q2: I usually make good grades in Social Studies.	0.855	3.902	80%	8%	11%
Q3: When we use primary sources in the classroom I am more interested in what the lesson is about.	0.985	3.4314	45%	16%	39%
Q4: Primary sources help me to better understand historical events than reading about them in the textbook.	1.173	3.51	59%	20%	21%
Q5: When I read a primary source it is important to know who the author is.	1.253	3.431	57%	21%	21%
Q6: When I read a primary source it is important to know where it was written.	1.221	3.294	55%	23%	22%
Q7: When I read a primary source it is important to know at what point in time it was written.	0.84	4.24	88%	4%	8%
Q8: When I read a primary source the most important thing to understand is the author's perspective.	0.901	3.706	69%	14%	18%
Q9: I feel like history is just a bunch of pointless facts I have to memorize that really don't relate to my life.	1.248	2.039	16%	70%	14%
Q10: When reading about historical events I try to imagine as if I were participating in them to gain a better understanding.	1.157	2.98	39%	39%	22%
Q11: Using primary sources allow me to "see" history for myself.	0.947	3.059	33%	25%	41%
Q12: When reading a primary source I think about how when it was written affects the way I understand it.	1.129	3.255	45%	21%	33%
Q13: I like to think of history as pieces of a puzzle that need put together.	1.191	3.02	37%	37%	25%
Q14: I generally find reading about historical events from the textbook interesting and exciting.	1.332	2.51	27%	53%	20%
Q15: When reading a primary source I want to think about the reliability of its author before I read the source.	1.296	3	37%	39%	24%
Q16: I try and think of other possible explanations for a historical event from different perspectives.	1.045	3.451	57%	23%	20%
Q17: I think about how historical events could unfold and how I would act in that given situation.	1.125	3.333	55%	27%	18%
Q18: I enjoy small group activities that allow me to bounce ideas off of other people.	1.335	3.765	67%	20%	13%
Q19: When reading a primary source I think about why it was created.	1.065	3.157	43%	29%	27%
Q20: It is possible to have an unbiased source.	1.371	3.039	39%	39%	22%

1= strongly disagree; 2= disagree; 3= neutral; 4= agree; 5= strongly disagree

Appendix C  
Analysis of Student Agreement

<b>Student</b>	<b>Summative</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>Summative</b>
<b>S1</b>	80	<b>S26</b>	70
<b>S2</b>	72	<b>S27</b>	72
<b>S3</b>	73	<b>S28</b>	62
<b>S4</b>	74	<b>S29</b>	72
<b>S5</b>	77	<b>S30</b>	75
<b>S6</b>	76	<b>S31</b>	72
<b>S7</b>	66	<b>S32</b>	66
<b>S8</b>	49	<b>S33</b>	67
<b>S9</b>	69	<b>S34</b>	77
<b>S10</b>	55	<b>S35</b>	80
<b>S11</b>	72	<b>S36</b>	81
<b>S12</b>	71	<b>S37</b>	66
<b>S13</b>	74	<b>S38</b>	58
<b>S14</b>	55	<b>S39</b>	82
<b>S15</b>	61	<b>S40</b>	61
<b>S16</b>	72	<b>S41</b>	76
<b>S17</b>	75	<b>S42</b>	69
<b>S18</b>	68	<b>S43</b>	71
<b>S19</b>	63	<b>S44</b>	73
<b>S20</b>	81	<b>S45</b>	67
<b>S21</b>	73	<b>S46</b>	67
<b>S22</b>	62	<b>S47</b>	68
<b>S23</b>	48	<b>S48</b>	81
<b>S24</b>	57	<b>S49</b>	44
<b>S25</b>	69	<b>S50</b>	69
		<b>S51</b>	58

**Average Summative Score**  
68.549

**Standard Deviation**  
8.762

**Average Female Score**  
66.43%

**Average Male Score**  
70.03%

\* A Summative score of 100 means the student is in total agreement with the survey and views primary sources favorably. The lower the score, the less in agreement students are with the survey and the less favorably they view using primary sources.

Appendix D  
Open-Ended Respons

**Q. 21. What Is A primary Source?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>N</b>
Someone present/there/participated in the event during that time period.	46
Usually biased	3
A work sheet that tries to put you in the place of others to better understand the topic	1
A primary source is a source that you use for information. It is usual, the first, and main source	1
A primary source is a document that illustrates certain perspectives from specific time periods	1
A primary source is a source that goes strait for the person.	1
A primary source is a source that is primary to the reader.	1

**Q. 22. What types of documents are classified as primary sources?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>N</b>
Journals	26
Diaries	20
Letters	13
Newspapers	13
Eyewitness accounts	9
Autobiographies	6
Video Tapes	2
Pictures	2
Articles	2
Encyclopedias	2
Entry Logs	1
Speeches	1
The Internet	1

\*Answers were compiled using a tallying method. Each time a word came up in student responses it received a tally. Journals and diaries were counted as the same answer. So when students said Journals/Diaries together it only received one tally.

**Q 27. How do primary sources help you to better understand historical events?**

<b>Answer involves Response</b>	<b>N</b>
Shows other points of view	18
Shows first hand what really happened	10
Other	10
They don't	5
Personalizes Information	6
*Students gave many similar answers and they were combined into the above categories to show how students thought primary sources helped them to understand primary sources.	

**Q. 28. Explain how you would go about evaluating a primary source?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>N</b>
Contains elements of:	
Sourcing	14
Checking for Bias	8
Contextualization	6
Corroboration	0
Wouldn't evaluate because primary sources are boring	2
Use information to answer questions	3
No Answer/ Illegible	6
Not containing any elements from above responses. Ex. "I would read it and see if it were legit." "How well it was written and how factual it is", "Just read it thoroughly."	21

1

\*Student answers were analyzed using the definitions for sourcing, contextualization and corroboration. If their answers resembled an element of the heuristic they were counted as demonstrating knowledge of that heuristic.

Appendix D  
Open-Ended Responses

**Q.29 Do you feel engaged in the lesson during history class compared to other classes? Explain why or why not.**

**N**

**Answer**

Yes	19
No	24
Sometimes	8
Unclear	1

**Reasons for yes**

Like history itself	6
Like lecture	2
Like primary sources	1
Like memorization	1
Like the details in history	1
Like note taking	1
Easier to understand than other classes	1
Have more conversation in this class than others	2
Enables me to make good decisions for my future and not repeat mistakes in the past	2
I do because this is a class about what actually happened, its not theory nor pure application, but it can predict future events	1

**Reasons for No**

Boring	8
Not enough discussion	2
Don't like school	1
Don't care	1
Can't stay focused	1
Too many notes	5
Least favorite subject	1
Don't like memorization	1
Too much lecture	1

**Sometimes**

Depends on the subject	7
Depends on how tired I am	1
When we do activities and get involved	1

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